



### 13: Quit Something

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 13.

If this is your first time joining me here, this is a podcast for the second guessers, the chronically hesitant, or anyone who suffers from decision fatigue. This is also a place for those of you who may just need a little white space or a few minutes away from the constant stream of information or the sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment. You long for a thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step.

If you feel busy but not productive or rushing to get somewhere but never feeling like you've arrived, maybe you have a chronic case of the never enough's. If that's you, listen in.

It was the biggest boat we had ever seen in the harbor, looming large over all the others. I had been coming to Hilton Head Island in South Carolina every summer for over 10 years, and John had been coming all of his life. Still, this yacht was by far the most memorable either of us had ever seen there, making the other yachts around it look like toy boats run by pretend doll people.

As a habit, I confess, I generally don't like to stare at impressive things like cool cars or fancy people. It's just what they want us to do, so I always try to look the other way on purpose. It's my own quiet rebellion, I guess. But this time, I stood with everyone else, hands shielding our eyes from the setting sun, staring out into the harbor as the mini cruise ship moved slow, heavy, regal out to sea.

We overheard people say the crew was dressed all in khakis and white fancy shirts in the early day. And now at dusk, we could see them there in their black ties, carrying serving trays. We could hear music and the hum of excited voices and laughter coming from the deck as the yacht slowly made her way around the smaller boats. I nearly expected Jay Gatsby to walk right out onto the deck, nod to the crowd with a smirk and a white coat wave.

As the yacht pulled away, we saw her name inscribed on the back. "Never Enough," it said in gold letters. The irony was not lost on anyone watching. In a way, I wished I was there on that deck, a part of the buzz and the glitz and the mystery. But as I lazy looped my arm through John's and we meandered our way back to our beach house, I realized that this life I live is someone else's boat. They look and long and wish for this, and so do I, until I remember I already have it. That glamor life doesn't really exist, and the ones who chase it, discover it quick. It isn't really there. Whoever named the boat knew that. This stuff is never enough. Not really. Rick Hanson, a neuropsychologist, quoted in the Netflix documentary, *Minimalism*, says you can never get enough of what you don't really want.

It's been seven years since I first saw Never Enough floating slow in the harbor, but I think about it still. When I see a movie star on the cover of a magazine, I think about how her beauty and her money will never be enough. When I daydream about jumping on a plane to Paris, I think about how trouble lives there too. When I look at women in my own industry who seem to have things figured out, I think about how the never enough may have been the biggest yacht in our harbor that night, but she's not the biggest yacht in the world, not by far.

When you strive to be the biggest and the best, the smartest and the wisest, and the most interesting, your goal will always be frustrated with bigger and better, smarter and wiser, and much more interesting. Rather than chasing more, what if we discovered enough right where we are? So come with me on a short journey. One I bet you'll recognize, especially if you've ever spent a lot of time and energy on something and then you're asked to let it go.

It's 2001 and I've been working as a sign language interpreter in a high school now for two years. I'm good at it. Sometimes deaf people ask me if I'm deaf when they see me sign. I only tell you that because as an interpreter, it's the highest compliment for a deaf person to think that you might be deaf when they see you sign.

I have my degree in educational interpreting, but I want to get certified nationally. That is my highest goal. At least I think it is. But our wedding's in a month. The exam will have to wait.

In 2002, I walk into the exam room. The six hour drive to Atlanta lingers in my back. This is my second trip there. As the first time I came, I didn't pass the test. I'm yawning and the examiner asks me if I'm tired. I tell her yes, but the truth is I'm not. A yawn when I get nervous, and I've never been more so. She leaves the room after setting up the camera. I'm supposed to start signing as soon as I hear a voice. The red light is blinding and being taped and I'm a nervous wreck. I can't stop shaking. I really want this. I'm not exactly sure why, but I'm sure it will become clear when I get it. Maybe that's when I'll feel legitimate.

Three months later, the letter I've been waiting for is finally here. I don't want to open it, but I must. I think I might be sick. The nerves flood back like I'm taking the test now. I put a finger through the hole between the paper and the adhesive. "Congratulations," it says. So I finally arrived. Now my degree, the studying, the money, the scholarship, and all that time, now they're worth it. This paper is proof. I don't feel any different.

It's 2003 and they tell me I can use a golf cart to get around the campus if I need to. She hands me the keys and I can't help but laugh. The twins aren't due for four more months, but I'm big. I'm really big. I already can't see my feet. My boss knows that the 40 hour work week is starting to take a toll on my body, especially since the university is big and some of the classes that I interpret in are far apart. I feel ridiculous, but I use that golf cart anyway and absolutely love it.

My boss is kind to me. I'm dreading the conversation I have to have with her soon. I'm quitting. It's time for me to be home for awhile.

It's 2005 and it's been a long day. The twins are both finally asleep and the house is quiet. They'll be two

soon. An interpreting agency called again today. I told them no again today. I need to earn more CEUs to keep my certification active, but that idea exhausts me. There's something strong I can't shake. Something I think the Lord is drawing me to. It's time to write. I hear on the level of my soul. I'm excited and also terrified.

Yellow is dancing around in my head. Writing is yellow. The things that make us come alive always are.

Years later after my first book is published and I'm working on my second, I get another letter in the mail. "Dear Emily Freeman," it says, "We regret to inform you that your RID record shows that you did not meet the CEU requirements for your certification cycle that ended December 31st, 2011. Unfortunately, this means that we are required to revoke your certification." That was it. That was the end of the letter. And here's the truth, just because things change doesn't mean you chose wrong. Just because you're good at something doesn't mean you have to do it forever.

I cried a little when I read that letter, not because I had regrets, but because I didn't. Saying no to interpreting didn't come all at once, but it did come. That gradual no led to an eventual yes to writing. That's one thing about an intentional no. It can open the door for a life-giving yes.

When I focus on what's missing, it's hard to see what's there. Today, perhaps your next right thing is to slow long enough to see what's there. To stop looking around at what they have or what she's doing or what he said would be best, and to settle in and listen to your own life.

Now, if that feels hard, it could be that you're spinning around and looking for the next hundred things rather than the next one thing. Maybe you need a reminder to release your pursuit of what is impressive, productive, profitable, or expected. And instead, consider this, "What is essential?" It's the kind of thing we tend to save for January, but maybe we need it now more than ever.

Every week I mention at least one book that helps me live into the words I share on this podcast. This week, it's a book by Greg McKeown called *Essentialism*. He says essentialism is not about how to get more things done, it's about how to get the right things done. It doesn't mean just doing less for the sake of less either. It's about making the wisest possible investment of your time and energy in order to operate at our highest point of contribution by doing only what is essential.

Again, if it feels hard for you to decide what's essential, here are three ways to clear the soul clutter and get back to the basics. Number one, be picky who you listen to. If somebody's words, plans, or advice make you want to hyperventilate, take a hard pass. Breathe, remember who you are and what makes you come alive, and then repeat.

It could be that this exhausting advice is appealing to our false self. That's usually how it goes for me anyway. The false self can never get enough. David Benner says our calling is there for the way of being that is both best for us and best for the world. Be picky about who you listen to.

Number two, schedule a thinking day. This one will take some planning, but it's worth your time because remember, you're already spending a lot of time and energy on things you suspect may not be essential. So let's harness that energy and redirect it for the purpose of prayerful listening to the nudge of your own life and calling.

Episodes three and four of this podcast, ones called Make the Most Important List and the other one is Record What you learn, those two episodes could be helpful as you prepare for your thinking day. Now, the point of this day is to remember who you are. Consider this, even Jesus did not arrive knowing who he was. He came as a baby, fully dependent. His parents had to teach him who he was, and then Jesus had to work it out with his father.

Now, I realize maybe this is a strange thing to say and maybe I'm treading on theological ground that I don't know anything about, but scripture says everything Jesus did on earth was in total dependency on his father. That includes knowing who he was.

40 days in the wilderness, he was tempted to act outside of his identity, and yet he remained faithful to the call to be himself. He had to battle the critics and sometimes his own friends who thought he should be someone different, a king, a prophet, a military leader. He had to come to accept the true will of his father to die on the cross only three years into his ministry. I feel like it's safe to say that what kept him moving forward was not success, ability, skill or the consensus of the crowd. What kept him moving forward, what helped him to do his next right thing was knowing that his father was with him. And he could only remember that as he spent time alone with his father. So it goes for us, it's a time of remembering, of being, of knowing you're not alone. So schedule a thinking day.

Finally, number three, quit something. It doesn't matter what it is and it doesn't have to be big, it just has to be something non-essential. When you say no to something small, it could help to build your courage to say no to something else. Remember, it's not for the sake of saying no, it's so that you can say yes to what really matters. It's not so that you can get something you don't yet have. That leads to the never enough's. Instead, it's so that you can move from a sure place of who you already are.

I want to say something I'm not sure we hear very often, and that's that just because you feel unsettled doesn't mean you're not a content person. It doesn't mean you're selfish or scattered or that you just need to be more thankful. It could mean that, I guess, but it doesn't automatically mean that. Maybe instead it means, as Adam McHugh says, it's time to listen to your emotions rather than preach at them. Maybe your life is trying to tell you something. Maybe it's time to clear out a little space to listen to what you already know, that it's time to make a change.

Are you working hard towards something only to realize it isn't quite right anymore? Has your heart changed on an issue, but your mind hasn't gotten the memo? Have you been tricked into believing that doing more and working harder will lead to finally having enough or being enough? Could it be possible you already have enough? So in this quiet moment, ask yourself a question in the presence of your Father, "What is essential today?"

Father, we ask for clarity, but we understand that's not your highest priority. Draw us close in our confusion, our doubt, and our questions. May we not work so hard to get rid of those things. Rather, may we let the questions and uncertainties pave the way to you. Help us to know when to say yes and when to say no. We declare you are enough and we believe it, but help us in our unbelief.

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Thanks for listening to episode 13 of The Next Right Thing. If my advice to remember what makes you come alive feels foreign or strange, get thy self to your favorite retailer and pick up a copy of A Million Little Ways. It's a book I wrote to help you walk through what it means to uncover the shape of your own life.

And of course, if you would like to connect beyond the podcast, the best way to do that is to join my email list at [emilypfreeman.com/join](http://emilypfreeman.com/join), where you'll receive my monthly letter filled with first word news, the books I'm reading now, my favorite things list of the month, and a secret post you won't find anywhere else. My October letter goes out this week, so it's a great time to join. You can be sure that everything I write or speak about will always have one goal in mind, to help you create space for your soul to breathe so that you can discern your next right thing in love.

You can find out more about my books, my courses, and other offerings by visiting [emilypfreeman.com](http://emilypfreeman.com). And while you're there, click join in the navigation bar so you won't miss a thing.

Finally, you've probably noticed that each week, I reference at least one of my favorite books, if not more, in each episode. You can always find the links to those books in the show notes at [thenextrightthingpodcast.com](http://thenextrightthingpodcast.com). As always, you can find me on Instagram, [@emilypfreeman](https://www.instagram.com/emilypfreeman).

Some final thoughts from the wisest king who ever lived, a man who literally had everything he could have ever wanted and still found it lacking. Here's what Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes chapter three. There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the heavens.